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*Pictures of the Event are available for publication

South Jersey Breast Cancer Roundtable Participants Support Mammogram Legislation

CAMDEN, NJ—Department of Personnel Commissioner Ida L. Castro hosted a roundtable of South Jersey leaders to solicit input on a critical women's health initiative proposed by the Governor—the passage of health legislation to require mammograms to be covered by insurers for women under age 40 with a family history of breast cancer and a doctor's recommendation.

The roundtable, held at the Rutgers Camden Campus Center, was attended by over 50 participants, including breast cancer advocates, breast cancer survivors, legislators, union members, and community activists. The participants offered support and advice for the pending legislation.

"A woman shouldn't have to choose between feeding her kids, paying her rent, or getting a mammogram," said Commissioner Castro. "Governor McGreevey has proposed this initiative because he wants working families' lives to be better."

Currently, New Jersey law only requires insurance companies to cover an annual mammogram for women age 40 and older. For women with a family history of breast cancer, however, many doctors recommend that they begin annual mammograms ten years prior to the age at which their family was first diagnosed—for some women, that could be as early as age 25. Although some insurance companies will cover mammograms for women under 40, the decision is often made on a case-by-case basis or the patient has to obtain prior authorization from the insurance company to get approval for this procedure.

"It infuriates me that for \$150, insurance companies won't pay to save lives," said Karen Gerston-Rothenberg, a Nurse Practitioner at the LEAP Academy. "This should be a no-brainer. My work should be to convince my young women with a family history of breast cancer to go for mammograms—not to fight against insurance companies."

Even though breast cancer is the leading cause of cancer death in young women ages 15 through 40, many insurance companies do not classify young women as high-risk enough to cover their mammograms.

"Who would think anyone would oppose having women survive to nurture their children?" said Commissioner Castro. "But because there are those who oppose even the most compelling of initiatives, women and their families must stand up and take care of themselves so that they can take care of their children. That is why we are at this roundtable today."

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